

The Fallow Heart

by Robert Vaughan

All the way to San Fran:

The 101 jammed faster than a school of pirhana on a deadly target. Traffic darted left and right of us, passing us from the airport to my friend Rachel's flat in North Beach. My sister had met me, flown in from Pattapong. Now she fell asleep on my shoulder, her fiery red hair popped against my chartreuse sleeve. She barely moved, drooled a little. I noticed an omega symbol on her ankle. New tattoo. It felt strange, the silence, as more than a decade had passed. Still, holding her upright, and even more, keeping my body still, was my focus. The funeral arrangements were made, and we'd get through this. I stared out the window, the fog creeped up the Avenues like a spectator. I tried to feel something, anything, but, as usual, my heart was empty.

All I can remember:

She was never around much. Our mother was a cellist, and she refused to give up her career to raise us. Why did she have us then, my sister would say. Before they gave up, before Dad died by his own hands. Sis took his death personally, like she'd let him down. Well, she'd called 911 more than once. When Sis took off with Bennie, I never thought it would be the last time I might see her. I never heard a word. Rumors that she was in Los Angeles, or Seattle. I even hired a detective during college, when I had a dream that she'd drowned. Enter Facebook and Twitter and Tumblr. It took less than a year to track her down. My heart, a vacant memory now, emerges from shadows. And now she's here, in this cab, approaching the Tenderloin, and we used to dance to Boz Scaggs "Harbor Lights." And I was her Tokyo Rose.

All the camera shots:

Flying from the roof of our house into window- high snowbanks. Sitting at the piano plunking chords while she sang her own tunes:

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high, spacy, haunting. Egregious attempts at theater for neighborhood kids- her Cleopatra re-written, scored to lyrics of Joni Mitchell. A first fall day walk to school, maneuvering through goldenrod, queen anne's lace, jonquil, gathering bunches to take to our teachers. As the cab lurches, I hold her tighter. We are only these past selves to one another; nothing new, but a cab ride through a torn, shell-shocked landscape. As we arrive outside Rachel's house, the sky opens, and a torrent of rain pelts the cab. We dash, drenched, giggling, already soaked. When we reach Rachel's door, my missing heart bursts, beating in my ears.

